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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses ways that teachers can better manage their time and succeed in ther instructional goals. Ways to prevent five major types of compulsive time behavior are addressed. The behavior roles include: (1) "hurry up" role; (2) "be perfect" role; (3) "please me" role; (4) "try hard" role; and (5) "be strong" role. Emphasis is placed on considering how individual use of time affects others. (CB)

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Some Strategies to Improve Your Classes, Better Manage Your Teaching Time, and Avoid Burnout

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Time is our most valuable asset. It is important because how we as instructors handle and structure our time affects our students and our families.

Time is the one asset everyone has an equal amount of: we each have 60 minutes in an hour, 24 hours in a day, 7 days in a week, 52 weeks in a year, or 524,160 minutes in every year. How we use this time ultimately determines the quality of our lives. How we perceive time affects our use of time.

There are two main perceptions of time, clock time and process time. Clock time tends to be the way institutions view time in their daily operations. A 5 o'clock class means 5 o'clock, not 4:45 or 5:20. We often tie instructional computer programs to a clock so that students can't use a commodity trading game during prime class hours.

Process time refers to those activities that are completed when they are completed. We often talk about them in terms of clock time, but we're really referring to the process. How long does it take to have a baby? "Nine months", is the response, but it's the process itself and not the clock that determines this.

How long does it take a student to learn differential calculus? For some, perhaps a few weeks, for others a few months (or years!). Some of the weaker math students will actually do better on a comprehensive exam a month after the end of the course. Their learning process wasn't complete.

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Working parents are often caught between clock time and process time. A friend of mine with a four year old tries to be home by five o'clock and have supper on the table by six o'clock. She has found her four year old's internal time clock runs down about this time and she needs attention from her mother. When my friend ignores the child, she finds (at best) the kid hangs onto her and (at worst) is very disruptive. But when my friend stops to talk to the child and play with her for a few minutes, afterwards the child is satisfied and will play in the living room until supper.

A different way to view time is in terms of choice time versus compulsive time. Do we choose the use of our time, or are we somehow compelled to use time in a particular manner? Taibi Kahler's theory of compulsive time behavior has been applied by Dru Scott to time management in the following five major types of roles:

"Hurry Up" Role

These folks always rush, whether it's necessary or not. Often, these "hurry up" folks lack positive excitement and stimulation in their lives. Frantic last-minute activity to meet deadlines provides them with the missing stimulation. They may be procrastinators, waiting until the last twenty minutes to embark on an assignment they have had two days to accomplish. Or, they have gotten so bogged down in minutiae and trivial detail that the central task doesn't emerge until it's really too late.

A successful sales representative has built a few small accounts into a total of fifty. He rushes around trying to service all the accounts. But in reality most of his income is generated by only ten of these accounts. Most likely, the smaller accounts should be turned over to a less experienced person on his staff, freeing him to concentrate on those accounts producing

the most income, and allowing him time to develop other large accounts. His company would benefit too, because a new person could be gaining valuable experience on the smaller accounts.

How can this "hurry up" behavior be short circuited?

1. Satisfy the need for personal excitement and stimulation by building positive rewards and reinforcements into your schedule. Structure your central priorities so that they're exciting and attractive to accomplish.
2. Do the central concerns and priorities first. This harks back to having an "A list" for central concerns, a "B list" for secondary matters, and a "C list" for marginal concerns.
3. Set intermediate deadlines. Carve the central tasks into smaller, more do-able pieces. Grouping related activities is also helpful. If you need to make five telephone calls of which three are central and two are not, group the central three together.
4. Clarify what it is you want to accomplish. Ask yourself: "what do I want more of?", "what do I want less of?", and "what do I want to happen?"
5. Daily, give yourself time to think and evaluate. If you cut wood ten hours a day, the saw will get dull. Take time to sharpen the saw.
6. Look at your personal calendar when you have an unexpected free moment. If you're afraid of forgetting an important date, the thought of it will pop up again and again while you're doing other things. It frees your mind for the important tasks ahead to have your schedule written down instead of lurking in back of your thoughts.

"Be Perfect" Role

The "be perfect" type believes every task must be done perfectly, no matter how trivial or marginal. The student who recopies all her notes if one word is crossed out is a prime example. People who play this role also have trouble admitting an error; they will spend more time defending or trying to cover up the error than it would take to simply admit the mistake and correct it.

Decision-making also suffers under this role. Should a report's supplementary material be labeled "attachment" or "supplement"? A committee that spends ninety minutes to make this decision is operating in "be perfect" mode.

Another friend is seeking his ideal mate: she should have an income of at least $30,000 a year, desire children and be willing to care for them along with having a full-time job, and be willing to support my friend through graduate school. Needless to say, he has passed up some good potential mates in his never-ending search for perfection.

Another "be perfect" indicator is stacks of magazines and newspapers piling up unread. If you believe you must read every word, it's easy to generate a backlog of reading.

We recognize readily when the point of diminishing returns is reached in dollars and cents, but do we recognize it in other areas where perfection is not required, and in fact unnecessary? Perfectionists need to beware of the times perfection is too costly or inappropriate. Some may postpone a project entirely when they feel they can't do it perfectly.

To help escape the "be perfect" role:

1. Estimate how much time projects are really worth to you, and stick to the estimate.
2. Avoid perfectionism on marginal or secondary matters. Make a realistic estimate of how much time a task will take, build in a margin for the unexpected, then stick to the estimate.
3. Handle papers only once, or at worst, take some action on them each time you handle them.
4. Use headings in books and magazines as guideposts for material to read in detail. Reading every word is not required.
5. If you lose time searching for something, substitute something else whenever possible.
6. Every day, deliberately do at least one thing imperfectly.

"Please Me" Role

These folks can't say no; they say yes so often that they can't deliver on all their promises. Often, it's easier to say no, or take a tough stance, at the outset. Grading scales can be softened in the middle of the term, but it's nearly impossible to impose a tougher scale at that time.

One diffident instructor who knew he had great difficulty saying no effectively said no in advance. The first day of class at a new school and before the students arrived, he positioned a watebasket directly in the path he would take to the lectern. Once the students arrived, he came striding into the room, loudly asked, "who left this here?", and kicked the wastebasket clear across the room.

When we overcommit ourselves, we end up disappointing others and hurting ourselves.

To help avoid "please me" behavior:

1. Practice how to say no in advance. A direct "no" isn't a dirty word but a courtesy to others.
2. Clarify your objectives and tell others directly what you want.
3. Give yourself time each day to sort out your priorities and plan your activities. When you're clear about what you need to accomplish, you're less likely to say yes and regret it later.
4. Make use of a written "to do" list. When someone makes a request that's not on the list, ask yourself if it's sufficiently important to be added on to your list.
5. Every day, do something toward what you most want to accomplish in your lifetime and that fits your long-term goals.

"Try Hard" Role

People who play the "try hard" role need to look at the results of their time investment. They concentrate on getting the "A for effort", and don't have to account for their failure to achieve results within a reasonable time. They often sigh about how hard they work.

Accomplishing your objectives in a simpler way does not detract from the quality of the result. Trying hard is merely a process, not an end in itself. You limit yourself when you concentrate on effort rather on results. Work hard but without unnecessary effort, and work on the right things.

Some time techniques to avoid the "try hard" trap:

1. Clarify objectives before deciding on activities. Decide your short-term and long-term goals before launching into the activity.
2. Carve big projects into smaller, more workable steps. Set up these smaller steps that lead to the accomplishment of the project or goal.

3. Allocate the right kind of time to the right activities. Major tasks require major blocks of time.
4. Use gadgets to multiply your time. Dictating letters or reports into a tape recorder for a secretary to type later multiplies the use of your time during a long commute or airplane flight.
5. Every day, ask yourself: what is an easier way to accomplish this?

"Be Strong" Role

Traditional time management techniques often work well for this type. These techniques emphasize discipline and unemotional evaluation. And the "be strong" type believes more self-discipline is the key to better time management.

A typical "be strong" won't stop and ask directions when driving in an unfamiliar area, even if he doesn't have a map in the car. He thinks logic will lead him to his destination, even when asking directions would save time. This type doesn't like to rely on anyone else for help, and won't ask for help even when it is appropriate to do so. They fear asking might make them appear weak.

People who play this role often will duplicate accounting department information by keeping "cuff records". They want their own copying machine so they won't need to rely on copying services, and their own computer "in case the mainframe goes down" or "for project security".

Successful career women often fall into the trap of not delegating tasks or asking others for help, even when it is appropriate. They feel they must "be strong" and handle any task or bear any burden without assistance.

To circumvent "be strong" behavior:

1. If you find yourself procrastinating, discover the feelings you

are avoiding. For example, late thank you letters to guest speakers may be an avoidance of intimacy or closeness with others. Also, the timing of procrastination within a project is a signal. Do you procrastinate early, late, or in the middle? Holding off training a new assistant can be a signal that you fear losing authority.

2. Set realistic deadlines for yourself and for others.
3. Allow yourself time for productive action as well as "time out" to take care of your own need for rest and relaxation. (You can't be strong for others if you don't take care of yourself.)
4. Build rewards and reinforcements into your schedule. No one should always take on every onerous task at work or at home. Reward yourself for tasks accomplished as well as for learning to delegate.

Summing Up

Some people respond to these time behavior concepts with, "I don't do any of those things!" That's great; it means you operate from choice all the time. But studies have shown most of us operate anywhere from fifty to ninety percent of the time in compulsive roles. If you're the exception, it's still helpful to understand how the rest of us operate.

Others say, "I do all those things in a day." But the behavior is in reference to the situation; at home it's "please me" but at work it's "be strong." Don't be too quick to label yourself; time behavior fluctuates as much as any other aspect of our personality and behavior.

We need to consider how our use of time affects others. If you want your class to complete a project, but cannot clarify the assignment until three weeks before the end of the term, what sort of quality can you expect? If

your family complains that you're a stranger because you spend all your time at the office, what does it say about your personal priorities and the balance between work and family responsibilities in your life?

So how does this help us avoid instructor burnout? Avoiding burnout means acting to recharge our own batteries and structure our own rewrds. It means taking charge of our time in a constructive way, recognizing that we will still have unexpected demands placed on us and unavoidable interruptions at home and at work. It means acting to structure the classes we teach to make the best use of lecture time, and to guide the students to make better use of their time. It means building family time into our schedules so that our own children don't grow up with absentee parents. Ultimately it means using our time (our lives, if you will) in the most productive and satisfying ways both at home and at work.

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